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Lori Wright
UNH Media Relations

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New Collection At UNH Is First To Document African American Experience In NH

Contact: [Lori Wright](#)

603-862-0574

UNH Media Relations

March 14, 2007

DURHAM, N.H. -- The University of New Hampshire has established the first collection of papers, photographs and artifacts that documents African American life in New Hampshire.

The collection includes the papers of Betty and Barney Hill, founding members of the NH NAACP. In addition, the Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail is donating its archival materials to the collection.

"This collection recognizes the university's role in preserving the history of African American life in New Hampshire so that future scholars can tell our state's history in an inclusive way. The collection marks a commitment by UNH to form partnerships with organizations like the Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail that do not have the capacity to preserve and make available to the public their archives. It is hoped that other organizations and individuals will donate records that may otherwise disappear," said David H. Watters, director of the UNH Center for New England Culture.

While other institutions in New Hampshire, such as the New Hampshire Historical Society and Dartmouth College, have important holdings in African American materials, Watters said UNH's archive will focus exclusively on the African American experience in New Hampshire. The UNH African American Collection will be housed at the Milne Special Collections and Archives at the UNH Dimond Library.

"The establishment of this collection means that faculty and students at UNH will have wonderful opportunities to examine the primary stuff of history in the making over the past decades," Watters said.

The university will recognize the establishment of the UNH African American Collection at a reception at 4 p.m. Friday, March 30, 2007. The reception at the Milne Special Collections and Archives, Level 1 of the UNH Dimond Library, is free and open to the public.

The reception also will celebrate the publication of "Too Long in the Shadows: The Black Presence in New Hampshire" by the New Hampshire Historical Society. The publication is a special issue of the semi-annual journal Historical New Hampshire.

"The publication demonstrates that black history is not something that is foreign and irrelevant to New Hampshire but instead has permeated the history even of towns considered racially homogenous today," Watters said.

The three major articles in the publication relate life stories of blacks residing in towns across the state from the Seacoast to the Connecticut Valley. One essay concerns 20 Portsmouth-era slaves who petitioned the state legislature during the American Revolution for their freedom. Another article examines the relationship between whites and free blacks in Exeter from 1776 to 1876. A third essay reveals interconnected black settlements stretching from Newport, Croydon and Goshen in the Connecticut Valley to Warner and Sutton in central New

Hampshire. A foreward, introduction and book reviews present further research and insights on black New Hampshire.

Several UNH authors are featured in the special issue of Historical New Hampshire, including Professor Emeritus Robert B. Dishman, Professor W. Jeffrey Bolster, Professor Emerita Barbara A. White, Jody R. Fernald, Valerie Cunningham, and Professor David H. Watters.

For more information about the UNH African American Collection or the history of African American life in New Hampshire, contact David Watters at the Center for New England Culture at 603-862-0353 and david.watters@unh.edu.